

Communication from the Council meeting held on Monday 19 June

The core sentiment after this year's second SU Council meeting on Monday 19 June was that, as an institution, the University is on track to deliver on its academic mandate, notwithstanding some serious challenges faced by the higher education sector at present.

The management reports tabled at the meeting pointed to SU making inroads in the international research arena and positioning itself for stronger societal impact amidst the headwinds of unstable student funding and the deteriorating national power supply. This left Council with a sense of focus and agile resilience that bodes well for the future of our university.

Election of deputy chair of Council

At this meeting, Mr Jannie Durand, chief executive of Remgro, was elected as deputy chair of Council. Jannie has served on Council for many years in many capacities, including on the Executive Committee and the Audit and Risk Committee. I look forward to working closely with him in this new role.

Council appointments

Council also appointed Bertina Engelbrecht as a new member. Bertina is currently the group chief executive of the Clicks Group. A lawyer by training, she obtained law degrees from the universities of the Western Cape and Cape Town and completed a Management Development programme at the Stellenbosch Business School. She will join Council from 1 September.

We bid farewell to Masilo Silokazi and Phiwokuhle Qabaka, who are stepping down from Council once their terms on the Students' Representative Council (SRC) end. Both made valuable contributions to Council's discussions, and we look forward to engaging with their successors.

Management reports

In his management report ([Highlights](#) and [Addendum](#)), Rector and Vice-Chancellor Prof Wim de Villiers emphasised a range of significant achievements and successes that have contributed to SU's growing international profile and standing.

One of the notable achievements has been the creation of clusters of excellence under the banner of the African Union-European Union Innovation Agenda, led by the African Research Universities Alliance and the Guild of European Research-Intensive Universities. Under this initiative, SU will lead or co-lead four clusters of excellence, namely in artificial intelligence, data science and theoretical and computational thinking; genomics for health in Africa; nature-based solutions for climate change; and renewable energy. In addition, the University is a partner in the multimorbidity cluster of excellence, co-led by the universities of Ghana and Warwick.

This follows on the heels of another significant milestone – the opening of the state-of-the-art Biomedical Research Institute (BMRI) on SU's Tygerberg campus in April. This world-class facility will not only be a place for innovative research on some of the most pressing challenges that confront society but will be home to Africa's leading minds across the vast terrain of biomedical research. I had the great pleasure of being taken round this incredible facility by Prof Elmi Muller, dean of the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences, and her colleagues last week.

In addition to highlighting the University's achievements, Prof De Villiers also addressed the pressing challenges in the sector, particularly the insufficient support provided by the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) to qualifying NSFAS students (with serious consequences for their daily subsistence and accommodation), and the looming threat of extended periods of loadshedding. Management is deeply engaged on both these fronts.

With reference to loadshedding, Chief Operating Officer Prof Stan du Plessis provided a comprehensive overview of the measures implemented to mitigate associated risks and provide support to students and staff during what would be a period of unprecedented stress. At the same time, Council was advised of plans to roll out photovoltaic solutions on all our campuses in the short and medium term.

Prof Nico Koopman, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Social Impact, Transformation and Personnel, submitted his responsibility centre's annual report, which shed light on, among others, the progress made towards fostering meaningful transformation at the University. His presentation was aptly supported by Prof Aslam Fataar's update on the work of the Committee on the Institutional Response to the IKhamepele Commission's Recommendations (CIRCoRe). CIRCoRe's work is well under way and represents a significant step forward in driving transformative change.

Dr Antoinette van der Merwe, senior director of Learning and Teaching Enhancement, shared with Council the significant progress made with multilingualism at SU. This includes a recent language workshop for student leaders hosted by the Language Centre, where the University's Language Policy and its interpretation was unpacked. With a focus on demystifying language-related matters, the workshop aimed to foster a deeper understanding and appreciation of the linguistic diversity in the University community.

Finally, Prof Hester Klopper, Deputy Vice-Chancellor for Strategy, Global and Corporate Affairs, presented the proposed indicators that will serve as the 2023/24 scorecard. The scorecard is a vital tool that provides SU with a structured approach to assessing the performance of both the institution and management, aligning institutional activities, driving continuous improvement, fostering accountability, and promoting data-informed decision-making. The 2024 scorecard will be approved at the final Council meeting of 2023.

Lewis Committee report

Council awaits the report from the Lewis Committee appointed to investigate allegations of nepotism concerning the Rector's discretionary placements, specifically regarding placements of relatives of the Rector.

Concluding remarks

This meeting underscored the University's commitment to being Africa's leading research-intensive university, globally recognised as excellent, inclusive, and innovative, where we advance knowledge in service of society. This is an audacious endeavour that requires honest conversation, significant investment, and resilient focus. How lucky, therefore, that we have such committed stakeholders. Our precious institution and our students can only benefit.

Dr Nicky Newton-King

Chair of the Stellenbosch University Council